

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

*A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy*

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## President Obama's Message on Anniversary of Auschwitz Liberation

*President commemorates 65th anniversary of liberation of those who survived*

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of the Press Secretary  
January 27, 2010

Text of the videotaped message from President Barack Obama for the ceremony commemorating the 65th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau

Good morning. And thank you to everyone who worked to bring us to this day, especially the International Auschwitz Council and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

To President Kaczynski, Prime Minister Tusk, and to the people of Poland – thank you for preserving a place of such great pain for the Polish people, but a place of remembrance and learning for the world.

Although I can't be with you in person, I'm proud that the United States is represented there today by a delegation of distinguished Americans, including Ambassador Feinstein; my wife Michelle's chief of staff, Susan Sher; and my good friend, and the son of Holocaust survivors, Julius Genachowski.

And let me commend you for recognizing a woman who has devoted her life to preserving the lessons of the shoah for future generations – Sara Bloomfield of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

But most of all, I want to thank those of you who found the strength to come back again, so many years later, despite the horror you saw here, the suffering you endured here, and the loved ones you lost here. Those of us who did not live through those dark days will never truly understand what it means to have hate literally etched into your arms. But we understand the message that you carry in your hearts.

For you know the truth that Elie Wiesel spoke when I stood with him at Buchenwald last spring. There, where his father and so many innocent souls left this earth, Elie said that "memory has become the sacred duty of all people of goodwill."

We have a sacred duty to remember the twisted thinking that led here – how a great society of culture and science succumbed to the worst instincts of man and rationalized mass murder and one of the most barbaric acts in history.

We have a sacred duty to remember the cruelty that

occurred here, as told in the simple objects that speak to us even now. The suitcases that still bear their names. The wooden clogs they wore. The round bowls from which they ate. Those brick buildings from which there was no escape – where so many Jews died with Sh'ma Yisrael on their lips. And the very earth at Auschwitz, which is still hallowed by their ashes – Jews and those who tried to save them, Polish and Hungarian, French and Dutch, Roma and Russian, straight and gay, and so many others.

But even as we recall man's capacity for evil, Auschwitz also tells another story – of man's capacity for good. The small acts of compassion – the sharing of some bread that kept a child alive. The great acts of resistance that blew up the crematorium and tried to stop the slaughter. The Polish Rescuers and those who earned their place forever in the Righteous Among the Nations.

And you – the survivors. The perpetrators of that crime tried to annihilate the entire Jewish people. But they failed. Because 65 years ago today, when the gates flew open, you were still standing. And every day that you have lived, every child and grandchild that your families have brought into the world with love, every day the sun rises on the Jewish state of Israel – that is the ultimate rebuke to the ignorance and hatred of this place.

So to those of you who have come back today, I say, no, you are not "former prisoners." You are living memorials. Living memorials to the loved ones you left here. And to the spirit we must strive to uphold in our time – not simply to bear witness, but to bear a burden. The burden of seeing our common humanity; of resisting anti-Semitism and ignorance in all its forms; of refusing to become bystanders to evil, whenever and wherever it rears its ugly face.

Let that be the true meaning of Auschwitz. Let that be the liberation we celebrate today – a liberation of the spirit that, if embraced, can lead us all – individuals and as nations – to be among the righteous.

May God bless you all, and may God bless the memory of all those who rest here.

## Statement on Departure of Haitian Orphans Covered By Parole

*U.S. committed to working with Haitian government to protect children*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Office of the Spokesman  
January 26, 2010

MEDIA NOTE

## Departure of Haitian Orphans Covered By Humanitarian Parole

U.S. and Haitian government officials have met to discuss and establish a transparent and orderly procedure for securing departure approval for children already in the adoption process before the January 12 earthquake. This follows a January 22 Government of Haiti announcement of new procedures to protect children leaving the country, including those orphans eligible and already approved for humanitarian parole into the United States. Under the new requirement, the Government of Haiti must approve every child's departure from the country. The United States is seeking to expedite the departure of children approved for humanitarian parole so they may be united with their U.S. adoptive parents.

The decision to permit the departure of children before the full and final completion of adoptions is a serious matter. Both the Haitian and U.S. governments must confirm that each child is appropriately authorized for travel.

In the aftermath of a crisis such as the Haiti earthquake, children are especially vulnerable; and there is increased potential for abuse of, and trafficking in, children. The United States remains committed to working with the Government of Haiti to implement safeguards to protect children and their families in Haiti.

We appreciate the concerns that prospective adoptive parents have for the health and welfare of the children they are adopting, and their eagerness to receive their children in the United States as quickly as possible. We are confident that an approval procedure soon will be announced that ensures the expeditious departure of children who qualify for humanitarian parole. To date, humanitarian parole has been granted to almost 500 Haitian orphans in the process of being adopted, several hundred of whom are now in the United States.

## Iranian Americans Respond to Earthquake in Haiti

*Memories of Bam earthquake prompt outpouring of support*

By Jeff Baron

Special Correspondent

Washington — As they mobilize to help Haitians emerging from the rubble of an earthquake, Iranian Americans say they cannot help but remember the response to the quake that struck Bam, Iran, six years ago.

"The Haiti earthquake really managed to change the conversation in the community in a way that I haven't seen happen with anything since the Iranian elections," said Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council in Washington.

Parsi said other disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2005, have inspired the action and generosity of Iranian Americans. The magnitude 7 earthquake in Haiti, though, has particularly strong echoes of the magnitude 6.6 earthquake that struck southern Iran on Dec. 26, 2003, and killed more than 26,000 people in and around the ancient city of Bam. Although the United States and Iran have no diplomatic relations, Iran accepted emergency help from the U.S. government, American citizens and American nonprofit groups. Dozens of countries helped rescue people injured and left homeless by the Bam earthquake. "And now it's our turn to pay back, to return the favor," Parsi said.

In response to some other disasters, his group and others have organized fundraisers for relief efforts, Parsi said. This time, groups are urging members and supporters to make donations directly to aid groups so the help is available as quickly as possible.

One such appeal has been prominent on the home page of the Iranian American Medical Association's Web site. In a letter to members, Barry Sadegi, the group's president, appeals for monetary donations that will be funneled to the American Red Cross, as well as for medical supplies and volunteers for Doctors Without Borders.

Physician and Yale University Medical School professor Asghar Rastegar reflected on the differences between the response in Haiti and what was needed in Bam, where he worked as part of the relief effort.

As destructive as the Bam earthquake was, Rastegar said, Iran still had a functioning health system, and with the help of volunteers, organizations and governments from around the world, it was able to care for the injured. The need for international aid in Bam was immediate but short term.

Two days after the Bam earthquake, Rastegar was on the ground there. A nephrologist, he said many people who are pulled from the rubble after an earthquake suffer from kidney damage. He worked mostly in the provincial capital of Kerman, which was not badly affected, in "a wonderful, highly developed hospital." He spent two weeks in Iran on that trip. (He continues to visit Iran each year to teach at a number of hospitals.)

Haiti, by contrast, is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and was struggling with health care even before the earthquake, Rastegar said. "It was already a health structure that was unable to provide adequate care because of a lack of resources," he said, calling the health care system there "phenomenally fragile."

And the Haitian earthquake was especially destructive because it struck the capital. "Port-au-Prince has a third of

the population of the country,” Rastegar said. Although earthquakes in Bam and elsewhere in Iran have been devastating, no Iranian city has so large a portion of the population and health care facilities. Tehran, with 7.7 million people, has about 11 percent of Iran’s population.

Rastegar works with Yale’s global health program, which since 1982 has had a working relationship with a hospital in Deschepelles, a town in Haiti largely undamaged in the earthquake. “We began sending young doctors there to work in the hospital along the side of Haitian physicians who work there,” Rastegar said.

Although he did not make the trip to Haiti, “I’m involved in trying to see what we can do in the long term” to rebuild Haiti’s health system, he said.

### **World Has Made Progress in Earthquake, Tsunami Warning Since 2004**

*Indian Ocean tsunami prompted international help for vulnerable regions*

By Cheryl Pellerin  
Science Writer

Washington — Five years after the magnitude 9.0 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami killed 230,000 people and displaced millions, this region and others worldwide — including the Caribbean, where Haitians are struggling for their lives after the disastrous January 12 temblor — are better prepared than ever to monitor, detect and respond to natural disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis.

With oversight and coordination from the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), and with technical and financial help from many nations, initial seismic and tsunami warning systems are in place and continue to be improved in the Indian Ocean, the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean, and the Caribbean.

In the Indian Ocean, many nations have contributed to 73 seismic stations and more than 60 coastal sea-level stations. Australia, Germany, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and the United States have installed deep-ocean tsunameters in the region to detect tsunami waves traveling across the ocean. Each nation has a warning center, and Australia, India and Indonesia are providing tsunami watch services for the region. Many nations have implemented community-awareness programs and conducted evacuation drills.

With international help, the Northeastern Atlantic and Mediterranean region has a seismic monitoring system that now supports an interim tsunami warning system, and the sea level monitoring network is being upgraded

to establish a core network of real-time tsunami stations.

In the Caribbean, building on the island nations’ long experience in dealing with hurricanes, storm surges, volcanic eruptions and mudslides, U.S. technical agencies and other international partners have provided new seismic stations, tide and deep-ocean monitoring devices, and training; national and community disaster plans are being developed.

“World seismic networks have continued to improve over time because of general advances in information technology. There are more and more options for getting data from point A to point B around the globe and seismic instrumentation continues to improve,” Charles McCreery, director of the U.S. Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) in Ewa Beach, Hawaii, said in a recent interview. “But the tsunami in 2004 caused decision makers to throw more resources at this problem, which has helped.”

### **TSUNAMI THREAT**

At 8 a.m. on a Sunday morning in December 2004, the massive India tectonic plate moved under the Burma plate off the northwest coast of Indonesia’s island of Sumatra in a process called subduction, lifting the ocean floor by several meters. Half an hour later, the first of a series of giant tsunami waves hit the coast of northern Sumatra, then later Thailand, Sri Lanka and other countries ringing the Indian Ocean.

On that day, only the United States and Japan had tsunami early warning systems and these covered the Pacific Ocean, where 85 percent of tsunamis historically occur, according to the International Tsunami Information Centre. But earthquakes, undersea landslides and explosions can generate tsunamis in all of the world’s oceans, inland seas and large bodies of water.

Just over five years later, late on a Tuesday afternoon near Port-au-Prince, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake caused shaking that was felt throughout Haiti and the Dominican Republic, in the Turks and Caicos Islands, southeastern Cuba, eastern Jamaica, parts of Puerto Rico and the Bahamas, and as far away as Tampa, Florida, and Caracas, Venezuela.

“Only 10 minutes after the earthquake, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center was able to issue a tsunami watch for Haiti, Cuba, the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic,” Bernardo Aliaga, technical secretary for UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Caribbean Tsunami Warning System, said in a January 26 interview.

“People in the Meteorological Department in the

Dominican Republic got the warning in 10 minutes,” he added. “They communicated with the Cabinet, the prime minister’s office, and they were able to get the news to the television within 20 to 25 minutes to make people [in the Dominican Republic] aware of what was going on with respect to the possibility or not of a tsunami. In the case of Haiti there was no time for anything.”

One minute and 32 seconds after issuing an initial tsunami watch, the PTWC in Hawaii, part of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, cancelled the watch.

A tsunami measuring 12 centimeters from wave crest to trough was recorded at Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic and a tsunami of less than 1 centimeter was recorded on a deep-ocean tsunameter in the east-central Caribbean. There could have been destructive tsunami waves near the earthquake epicenter, the PTWC tsunami message read, “but there is not a threat to coastal areas further away.”

### **Contact Group on Piracy off Somalia Marks First Anniversary**

*United States partnering with many more nations and organizations*

Washington — The United States will join partners from more than 50 countries and international organizations at the United Nations in New York January 28 for a meeting of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, a growing diplomatic effort that is making steady progress against criminals targeting Africa-bound humanitarian aid shipments and other vessels transiting one of the world’s busiest shipping corridors, the U.S. Department of State announced January 26.

The meeting, hosted by Norway, will be the fifth gathering of this unique international partnership, established in January 2009 by 24 nations and six international organizations to coordinate an effective international response to piracy in the Somali Basin and surrounding waters following the adoption of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1851.

Since then, the Contact Group has doubled in size, a testament to the global consensus that piracy poses a shared security challenge to maritime safety. Among its accomplishments in its first year, according to the statement, the group lists the following:

- Coordinated operations of an unprecedented international naval effort from more than 20 countries working together to escort vessels and patrol the vast waters of the region. The United States stands with NATO and the European Union in these efforts, and also looks to build on new counterpiracy cooperation with countries

such as China, India and Russia.

- Partnered with the shipping industry to improve practical steps merchant ships can take to avoid, deter or delay pirate attacks and encouraged their adoption through the New York Declaration, a parallel political commitment developed outside the Contact Group by ship registry states to implement these internationally recognized best management practices, which have proven an effective deterrent and leading factor in the declining success rate of pirate attacks.

- Developed an International Trust Fund to defray expenses related to prosecuting suspected pirates and other Contact Group initiatives. The United States supports prosecution-related efforts, as well as capacity-building programs to help countries in the region and elsewhere become more self-sufficient in confronting pirate attacks and prosecuting suspected pirates and their enablers.

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